

COLDS

WHAT IS A COLD?

A **cold** is an infection in the nose and throat that can be spread easily to other people.



WHAT CAUSES A COLD?

Colds are caused by more than 200 different viruses known as rhinoviruses. They are not caused by the same viruses responsible for influenza (“the flu”). Colds spread through exposure to droplets from the coughing or sneezing of others with a cold or by hand contact with objects contaminated by someone with a cold.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF A COLD?

- Runny nose
- Nasal congestion
- Sneezing
- Sore throat
- Cough
- Muscle aches
- Headache
- Low-grade fever (102 F or lower)

The symptoms usually last less than two weeks.



AM I AT RISK FOR DEVELOPING A COLD?

Colds occur more frequently in children and decrease with age because immunity to the virus causing the cold occurs after the illness. Gradually, immunity to a wide variety of viruses that cause colds is developed in adults. On average, children have 10 colds a year and adults have 3.

HOW IS A COLD DIAGNOSED?

A cold is diagnosed based on the symptoms.

HOW IS IT TREATED?

- Treatment by a health care provider is not necessary unless symptoms continue, or existing respiratory conditions are worsened by the symptoms.
- Antibiotics are not appropriate treatment for colds.
- Home care measures may relieve some of the symptoms of the cold, but will not affect the duration of the cold. These measures include:
 - Taking over-the-counter pain relievers
 - Drinking plenty of fluids
 - Rest

HOW CAN I PREVENT COLDS?

There is no scientific evidence to support the belief that avoiding cold temperatures or drafts or taking large amounts of Vitamin C will prevent colds.

The following may help lessen your chances of catching a cold:

- Wash your hands often. You can pick up cold germs easily, even when shaking someone's hand or touching doorknobs or handrails.
- Avoid people with colds when possible.

- If you sneeze or cough, use a tissue and then throw the tissue away.
- Clean surfaces you touch with a germ-killing disinfectant.
- Don't touch your nose, eyes or mouth. Germs can enter your body easily by these paths.

REFERENCES / LINKS

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Food and Drug Administration

<http://www.fda.gov/opacom/lowlit/clds&flu.html>

U.S. National Library of Medicine and National Institutes of Health

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000678.htm>

National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases

<http://www.niaid.nih.gov/factsheets/cold.htm>

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER



You usually do not have to call your doctor right away if you have signs of a cold. But you should call your doctor in these situations:

- Your symptoms get worse
- Your symptoms last a long time
- After feeling a little better, you develop signs of a more serious problem. Some of these signs are a sick-to-your-stomach feeling, vomiting, high fever, shaking chills, chest pain, or coughing with thick, yellow-green mucus.

There are two key people on your health care team, you and your health care provider. You are just as important as your provider in directing your health care. The first step you should take in becoming an active team member of your health care team is to understand what you are being treated for and why. Continue to ask questions until you understand the answer. By paying attention to your health and maintaining your own records, you will become an active, informed decision maker in your health care.



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